You win some, you lose some: The geographical manipulation of candidate lists in Belgium

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Abstract

Both political science and geography scholars have demonstrated that local candidates matter in elections. Political scientists argue that these candidates cultivate personal votes on the basis of local roots in their area (Shugart et al., 2005). Geography scholars, on the other hand, stress the importance of friends and neighbors effects to explain the electoral value of local candidates (Key, 1949; Cox, 1969). This paper examines whether parties use the electoral value of local candidates in parliamentary elections, and change the geographical composition of candidate lists in response to local electoral volatility. If parties significantly lose votes in an area, they might consider compensating for this loss by increasing the number of local candidates in that area. Using data on the composition of candidate lists and election results for the Belgian Lower House (1987-2010) of eight political parties, we analyze the relationship between local vote shares and local candidate shares. The results show that intra-party candidate selection methods determine changes in local candidate shares. More specifically, while parties with decentralized selection methods are more inclined to apply a consolidation strategy, parties with centralized methods follow the alternative expansion strategy.

Key words: electoral geography, candidate selection, local candidates, local electoral volatility, Belgium

1. Introduction

How do parties respond to local electoral volatility in parliamentary elections? While election campaigns and results are becoming more and more nationalized (Caramani, 2004), political parties are still confronted with regional and local variation in electoral support. A possible response is to change the geographical composition of their candidate lists for subsequent elections. Parties confronted with electoral losses in local areas might be inclined to raise the number of locally rooted candidates from those areas on the list. The increased presence of candidates could then lead to higher electoral support in subsequent elections.

This argument is based on the strong theoretical claim that candidates with local roots (e.g. place of residence, birthplace, holding local office) often enjoy an electoral advantage in their local area compared to non-local competitors (Parker, 1983; Marsh, 1987; Blais et al., 2003; Shugart et al., 2005). If this is indeed the case, then political parties would be able to strategically manipulate their candidate lists in response to local electoral setbacks. But do parties take the electoral value of local candidates into account in the candidate selection process? Do they indeed manipulate candidate lists for the next elections in order to increase electoral support in specific areas? And will parties also change the composition of party lists in the event of electoral success?

This paper analyzes the effect of within-district electoral volatility on the geographical composition of party lists. We expect that changes in local party results will affect the share of local candidates in subsequent elections. In other words, parties will adapt the within-district dispersion of candidates on the basis of previous election results. Since the number of list positions is always limited, parties have to deal with these scarce resources in a sensible manner.

The composition of candidate lists is the outcome of intra-party candidate selection processes. Previous research has shown that these processes greatly vary, both over time and parties, in terms of voting procedures, candidacy, centralization and inclusiveness of the selectorate (Bille, 2001; Lundell, 2004; Hazan and Rahat, 2010). Arguably, the parties' ability to manipulate or change their candidate lists from one election to another strongly depends on the nature of their candidate selection processes. Therefore we will analyze which candidate selection methods provide parties with the greatest flexibility to manipulate the composition of their candidate lists. We collected data on the composition of candidate lists and election results of eight Belgian political parties for seven consecutive Lower House elections (1987-2010).

2. Election candidates and the value of their local roots: Personal votes, friends and neighbors

Both the field of political science and electoral geography has extensively documented on the effects of local candidate roots in elections. There is a strong consensus that localism plays an important role in electoral politics, and that local roots of election candidates can be considered important determinants of voting behavior. In their seminal work on candidate selection, Gallagher and Marsh (1988) stated that local roots are invariably sought by party selectorates. However, the two disciplines have developed different approaches and operationalizations of the local roots concept, and identified different mechanisms to explain its importance.

Political science literature, on the one hand, has strongly focused on local roots as informational shortcut for voters (Shugart et al., 2005). More specifically, candidates with local roots in the district make a more convincing claim that they are well aware of local constituency needs. Voters use this information in their voting decisions, resulting in

significantly more personal votes for these candidates (Tavits, 2009; Tavits, 2010; Put and Maddens, 2014). In other words, local roots are used as informational shortcuts by voters to simplify their decision-making processes. In this line of research, local roots are usually operationalized in terms of political experience at the local level (Tavits, 2010), being born in the electoral district (Smith et al., 2012) or place of residence (Put and Maddens, 2014).

In political geography, on the other hand, there is a much stronger emphasis on local roots operationalized as the place of residence of candidates. The most influential work on this topic is provided by Key (1949) and Cox (1969), who described the existence of the friends and neighbours effect in electoral behavior. This effect explains why voters tend to support candidates living in, or close to their respective areas and has been replicated several times (see for example: Arzheimer & Evans, 2012; Gorecki and Marsh, 2014). The theory stresses the importance of social distance between voters and candidates. More specifically, voters tend to have more knowledge of their local candidates because their communication networks are highly localized and they are more likely to be exposed to information about a nearby candidate (Parker, 1983).

These findings have far-reaching consequences for political parties in both majoritarian and proportional electoral systems: there is indeed a strong acknowledgement by parties that candidates with local roots are valuable electoral assets (Bochel and Denver, 1983; Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Childs and Cowley, 2011). This implies that parties will generally prefer to recruit candidates with some level of experience in local politics. This experience is then measured by experience in holding local political office.

Concerning the place of residence of election candidates, the story gets more complicated. To enjoy the benefits of locally rooted candidates all over the electoral district, parties need to geographically balance their ticket over different areas of the district. As a result, a

geographically diverse set of candidates is needed, but the nature of this exercise strongly depends on the electoral system. In majoritarian systems, where district magnitude usually equals one, parties will nominate the candidate with the broadest electoral appeal (Tremblay, 2012). In other words, parties nominate one candidate from one particular area in the district. In proportional electoral systems with higher district magnitude, parties nominate groups of candidates on candidate lists. This allows them to balance candidate characteristics in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, profession, but also their place of residence (Valdini, 2012).

The existence of friends and neighbours voting effects stimulates parties in proportional systems to nominate candidates from various areas within the electoral district. If a party would only select candidates from the largest city of the district, they risk losing potential votes in other areas of the district due to a lack of locally rooted candidates from those areas. From this viewpoint, candidate positions on the party list could be considered scarce resources which should be carefully distributed within districts (Latner and McGann, 2005).

3. How parties respond to within-district electoral volatility

We already discussed why parties have the incentive to geographically balance their candidate lists. But how exactly will parties manipulate the geographical distribution of candidates in response to within-district electoral volatility? We develop two types of party behavior in this respect. The first is called the **expansion strategy** (Figure 1), which defines parties that increase the number of local candidates in areas where they are losing votes. The horizontal axis of Figure 1 depicts the change in party share (Δ PS) in a particular local area from election t-2 to election t-1. The vertical axis shows the change in candidate share (Δ CS) in that local area from election t-1 to election t.

In this first strategy, parties respond to a local electoral setback in election t-1 by increasing the number of candidates with place of residence in that area for election t. The higher the

electoral setback in the previous election, the larger the increase in candidate share on the list in the subsequent election. As Figure 1 shows, parties following the expansion strategy will increase candidate shares in losing areas at the expense of winning areas. In sum, this type of party aims to increase their vote share by investing more local candidates in areas where they previously lost votes. Hence, the hypothesis for this strategy is:

H1. *The change in local party share from election t-2 to election t-1 is negatively correlated with the change in local candidate share from election t-1 to election t.*

Arguably, this strategy requires a certain amount of coordination by the party elite or selectorate drafting the candidate lists. Candidate selection processes are highly complex puzzles where parties balance candidate characteristics, factional interests and strategic considerations. In order to increase candidate shares as response to losing votes in specific areas, the party elite needs to have control over candidate selection decisions. Only then will parties be able to make a shift to the expansion strategy.

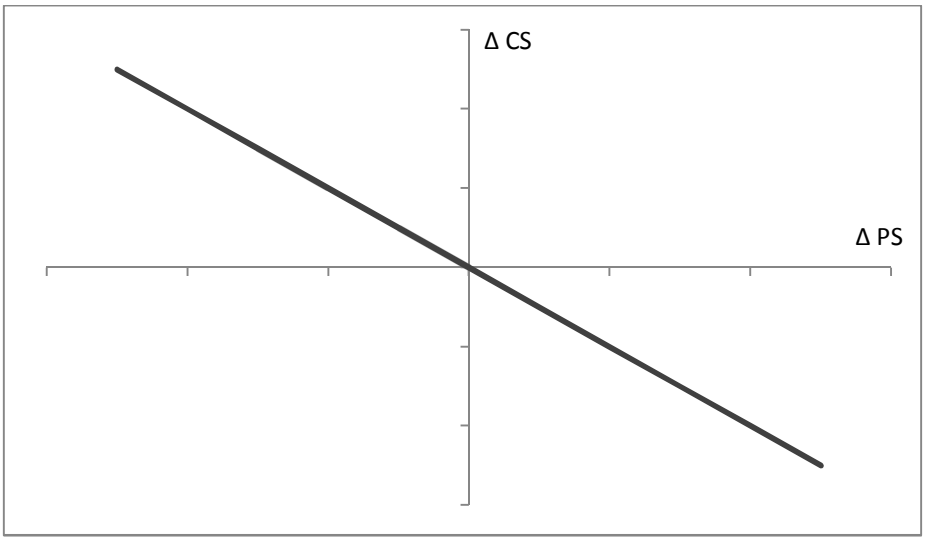

Figure 1: The expansion strategy, with a negative correlation between change in party share from election t-2 to election t-1 (Δ PS) and change in candidate share from election t-1 to election t (Δ CP).

A second type of strategic behaviour is the consolidation strategy (Figure 2). Party selectorates following this strategy intend to defend the areas where they gained in vote share over the last two elections. In other words, these parties increase their candidates in areas with a positive election result: the right hand side of the graph shows that an increase in party vote share over the last two elections leads to an increase in candidate share in those areas. In other words, the consolidation strategy implies that parties will increase candidate shares in winning areas at the expense of losing areas. These parties will essentially give up on areas where their electoral losses have been too large, and focus on the positive electoral swings during the previous elections. The hypothesis for this strategy states:

H2. *The change in local party share from election t-2 to election t-1 is positively correlated with the change in local candidate share from election t-1 to election t.*

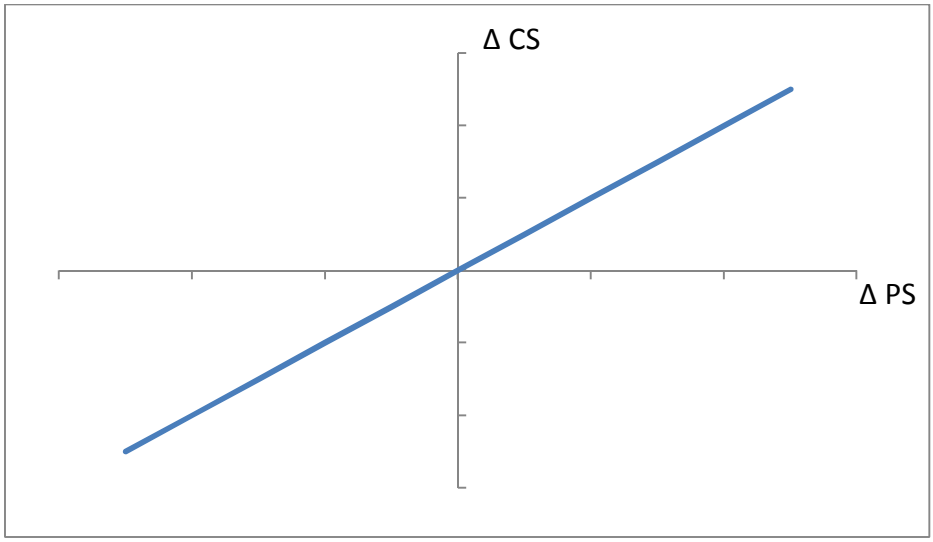

Figure 2: The consolidation strategy, with a positive correlation between change in party share from election t-2 to election t-1 (Δ PS) and change in candidate share from election t-1 to election t (Δ CP).

Arguably, the consolidation strategy is a very natural strategy for political parties. It implies that parties mainly recruit candidates in areas where they are electorally successful. This is logical: parties will always tend to select more candidates in electoral strongholds, since local

party branches and political networks of parties have been more developed in those areas then elsewhere. In other words, the causality between local candidate presence and party vote shares might also work the other way around: not only could candidates with local roots increase vote shares in their area, but high vote shares will also increase the recruitment of local candidates in those areas. In this sense, the consolidation strategy marks a self-reinforcing effect which parties will experience if they do not actively decide to shift to the expansion strategy.

4. The effect of candidate selection processes

In sum, there are two list manipulation strategies parties might follow in their candidate selection processes. The parties' ability to shift strategies, however, depends on the nature of their candidate selection process. If the (national) party elite strongly dominates the process, parties will be more inclined to apply the expansion strategy. If, on the other hand, the selection process involves several other intra-party stakeholders, it will be more difficult to shift towards the expansion strategy, and the party will more likely apply the consolidation strategy.

The selection of candidates for parliamentary elections is one of the core functions of political parties (Sartori, 1976). Therefore, it is no surprise that this topic has received considerable research attention. The analytical framework of Hazan and Rahat (2010) provides a useful set of variables for the comparative analysis of candidate selection methods. Their model disentangles four dimensions, among which inclusiveness of the selectorate and decentralization are the most important. The selectorate, on the one hand, is the body that selects the candidates, and can be composed of only one person, or several people, up to the entire electorate of the nation. This dimension can be measured on a continuum from exclusive selectorates, where a very limited group of selectors take control, to inclusive

selectorates, such as the party members or the electorate. Decentralization, on the other hand, measures the extent to which local party branches nominate party candidates. In highly centralized methods, the national party level has complete control over the nomination process.

One strand of the literature on candidate selection discusses which is the ideal selection method (Rahat, 2009). From a democratic viewpoint, highly inclusive processes are preferable: these processes involve party members or even voters in intra-party decision-making procedures. However, other scholars have argued that high inclusiveness might have detrimental consequences for party management by party elites. First, the dual accountability created by this process might lead to decreased party cohesion, which threatens government stability and functioning of democracy in general (Hazan and Rahat, 2006). Second, since inclusive candidate selection methods form a complex coordination game, the resulting candidate lists are often not very representatively composed. Rahat et al. (2008) find that selection methods with membership ballots are less likely to produce candidate lists with women on safe positions.

Highly exclusive methods, however, do lead to highly representative sets of candidates. Selectors in exclusive party committees are more inclined to base their decisions on evaluations of the collective party good. In other words, these party committees are asked to construct a list of candidates that they think has the best chance of maximizing the electoral result, and keeping the intraparty turmoil to a minimum. Inclusive membership ballots, on the other hand, will lead to unbalanced candidate lists because the actions of such a vast selectorate are more difficult to coordinate than the actions of party committees with a limited number of selectors.

The argument is largely similar from the viewpoint of strategic list manipulation: in the case of exclusive candidate selection methods, the party elite has more flexibility to shift strategies. This is not the case with inclusive candidate selection methods, where the number of stakeholders involved in the candidate selection process is too large to develop a clear response to local electoral volatility. Following this argument, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H3. *Parties with exclusive candidate selection methods are more likely to follow the expansion strategy than parties with inclusive candidate selection methods.*

The effect of decentralization is not that straightforward. We already mentioned the zero-sum nature of geographical list manipulation: increasing candidate shares in one area of the district automatically implies decreasing candidate shares in other areas. This implies that the party should at least have a bird's eye perspective over the electoral district: any involvement of the sub-district level party branches complicates this exercise even further. More specifically, if local (municipal) party branches are involved in candidate selection, they will not be inclined to lower their share of candidates to the advantage of other local branches, regardless of the electoral result in previous elections.

So any level of decentralization involving sub-district party branches would be problematic for parties. If candidate selections are taking place at the district level, the party at least has an overview of the entire electoral district and is able to respond properly to local electoral volatility. But arguably, nationally centralized candidate selection methods are even more preferable: centralized parties can develop a clear strategy both within and between districts in response to local electoral volatility. National party elites would be able to impose the expansion strategy within all electoral districts. If, on the contrary, every district party decides

autonomously, strategies will strongly diversify which endangers party cohesion. Hence the fourth hypothesis of this paper:

H4. *Parties with centralized candidate selection methods are more likely to follow the expansion strategy than parties with decentralized candidate selection methods.*

5. Case selection, data and methods

Being a multilevel democracy with separate regional party systems, Belgium is a country case with local sensitivities and complex territorial dynamics. Moreover, its proportional representation electoral system for parliamentary elections works with large multimember districts, in which a lot of seats are at stake. Contrary to single-member districts, electoral competition in multimember districts involves multiple parties with candidate lists. Multimember districts thus allow parties to distribute their candidates over various parts of the electoral district. These candidates are crucial for collecting votes in their local areas on the basis of familiarity and networks. As a result, Belgian parties will attach great importance to within-district electoral volatility and the distribution of their election candidates.

The Belgian electoral system is a flexible-list system: voters can support the party list as a whole or cast preference vote(s) for candidates on party lists (Shugart, 2005). While the allocation of seats is determined by both list order and preference votes, the threshold of preference votes to overcome list order is infrequently reached. These flexible-list systems therefore more strongly resemble closed- than open-list systems (De Winter, 2005).

The importance of rank order implies that not every candidate has the same perspective on winning a seat. The highly ranked candidates have considerably more chances of getting elected to parliament than candidates placed in the lower positions on the party list. This is not only caused by the mechanical effects of the electoral system, but also because of voters'

propensity to vote for higher ranked candidates and the higher campaign visibility for highly ranked candidates (Miller and Krosnick, 1998).

While examining the geographical distribution of candidates on party lists, one should take into account these differences between types of candidates. In this paper, candidates assigned to realistic list positions will be double-weighted and candidates in unrealistic positions only counted one time. The used dichotomy realistic-unrealistic list positions is similar to previous work (see, for example: Maddens et al., 2014; Put, forthcoming). In practice, Belgian party selectorates often distinguish between realistic and non-realistic list positions with previous election results as benchmarks. For example, if a party won two seats in a district during the previous election, the first two positions could be considered realistic: the candidate on the third position stands a realistic chance of getting elected dependent on her number of preference votes and/or a positive result by the party list.[2] We register the number of seats parties won in the district in the previous election, and consider that number of positions at the top of the list as realistic.[3]

The next crucial decision is the selection of a geographical level as unit of analysis. Up until this point, we have talked about within-district candidate distribution and its relationship with parties' vote shares in local areas. But what is an appropriate operationalization of these local areas in the Belgian case? As already mentioned, Belgium has a very complex territorialization, and this is also noticeable within electoral districts. Under the district level, there are municipalities, kantons and arrondissements.

[2] In addition, the Belgian case has known many examples of the candidate at the bottom of the list managing to get elected instead of a higher ranked candidate (Wauters, Weekers, and Pilet, 2004). This is so because parties often choose experienced politicians for this position. For these reasons, the 'list pusher' will also be considered a realistic position in the analysis.

[3] Finally, a particularity of the Belgian system is that voters are presented with both lists of effective and substitute candidates. Substitutes for elected MPs are ranked on the basis of their preference votes, after distribution of list votes. MPs that quit during the legislative term are then replaced by the first substitute. Therefore, the first substitute candidate is also included in the category of realistic list positions, since this is a list slot with a realistic possibility of getting a seat in the event of resignation, death or a ministerial office for one of the other elected MPs on the list.

First, the lowest geographical level are of course the municipalities, in which parties also have their lowest organizational level in the form of local party branches. While municipalities are a meaningful geographical level to analyze electoral trends, the fundamental problem is that there is no data available at the municipality level for Belgian parliamentary elections.[4]

Second, electoral kantons are the lowest level for which there are data available on Belgian parliamentary elections. However, kantons are merely administrative units in which groups of municipalities coordinate and organize parliamentary elections. This level has no political or electoral implications, and kantons are very unequal in size (in terms of population). Moreover, data aggregation on the kanton level has shown that there is an insufficient number of candidates at this level for meaningful analysis.

Finally, the third sub-district geographical unit are the arrondissements. These have long been the electoral districts for parliamentary elections in Belgium. Before the electoral district reform of 2002, all districts were arrondissements or mergers of arrondissements. Since 2002, Lower House elections are organized in electoral districts that coincide with the Belgian provinces. However, the arrondissement level still has its political relevance since various Belgian parties still organize themselves to some extent on the arrondissement level (Wauters et al., 2003). As a result, we select these arrondissements as the unit of analysis for this paper. It is important to stress that we do not take into account arrondissements that form an electoral district on their own. In that case, parties are not able to distribute candidates over the various arrondissements within the district, since there is only one arrondissement.[5]

[4] From the 2014 parliamentary elections onwards, voting data will be available at the municipality level.

[5] Since we go back to t-1 and even t-2 for the calculation of ΔCS and ΔPS, we can only take into account arrondissements that did not form electoral districts on their own in those previous elections. The arrondissement of Antwerp, for example, has stayed a separate electoral district as late as the parliamentary elections of 1999. From 2003 onwards, the arrondissement of Antwerp became part of a larger (provincial) electoral district. So since then, the arrondissement of Antwerp became an interesting area for our analysis of within-district distribution of candidates. However, it was only in 2007 we could calculate ΔCS, since we need the relative number of candidates of the Antwerp arrondissement for t-1 (=2003 elections) and t (=2007 elections).

We gathered data on election candidates from eight Belgian political parties, four in each language group. These parties were permanently represented in parliament during the seven consecutive elections we have data for (1987-2010).This gives us a total of 519 observations or arrondissements which will be analyzed in the empirical part of this paper.[6] The two most important variables are the place of residence of Belgian election candidates and the party vote shares in the arrondissements. We calculated the number of candidates per municipality for every election and party and aggregated these data to the arrondissement level. For every party list, we calculated the percentage of candidates from an arrondissement in the district. This gives us the candidate share for every arrondissement. To get the change in candidate share (Δ CS), the dependent variable in this paper, we calculate the following:

$$\Delta CS = \frac{CS_t - CS_{t-1}}{CS_{t-1}}$$

This is the relative change in candidate share between election t-1 and election t for every arrondissement. Furthermore, the change in party share (Δ PS), the main independent variable of interest, is calculated according to the following formula:

$$\Delta PS = \frac{PS_{t-1} - PS_{t-2}}{PS_{t-2}}$$

While the next section will start with a bivariate analysis of this relationship, the third and fourth hypothesis of this paper can only be tested by means of a multivariate analysis where we take into account intra-party candidate selection methods and additional control variables. To test for the effect of candidate selection methods, we enter the level of decentralization and inclusiveness of the selectorate as independent variables to the analysis. Data on Belgian

[6] Data on the candidate lists were collected in the archives of the Belgian Lower House. Some of the electoral districts were missing in the archives, which drastically reduced the number of observations. Missing data: Bruges arrondissement, 1991; Liège province, 2003; Walloon Brabant province, 2003; Hainaut province, 2007. Furthermore, some parties did not provide correct information on the party lists for the district of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde. They registered every candidate on the list as living in the city of Brussels. Therefore, it was not possible to expand the analysis with these observations on the Brussels district.

parties' selection methods were collected on the basis of party regulations, news articles and recent literature.[7]

The two candidate selection variables, selectorate and decentralization, are measured on ordinal three-point scales.[8] First, the selectorate dimension has three categories: 1) exclusive selection, where non-selected nomination committees dominate the selection process, without any form of member influence; 2) The middle category groups selection procedures where party delegates form the selectorate; 3) the most inclusive category are the selection procedures with member influence, for instance primaries and member polls.

The second dimension is decentralization, which is also divided in three categories: 1) the highest level of centralization is reached if the national party level has a strong grip on the selection process, for example by practicing veto power or through modification of candidate lists in the final phase of the process; 2) the second category are candidate lists which are the outcomes of interaction between the national and district level; and 3) the most decentralized methods are those where the district party level (or lower) autonomously drafts the lists without interventions by the national party level.

6. Analysis

We expect changes in local candidate share to be related to changes in local party share. The theoretical section of this paper has already discussed the mechanism behind this relationship: candidates with local roots may increase the party's vote shares in their areas. We also argued that the causality might also work the other way around: parties automatically recruit more candidates in electoral strongholds. However, some parties may try to break this vicious circle and shift to another strategy, where they instead increase candidates in areas with decreasing

[7] Maddens et al. (2014) provides a more extensive discussion of the results on the Belgian candidate selection methods.

[8] The categories in these scales are based on the integrated six-point scale of candidate selection methods developed by Shomer (2009).

vote shares. An interesting starting point for the empirical analysis is to check whether there is a significant association between candidate shares and vote shares in the same election.

In our sample of arrondissements (N=519), we only found a weak correlation of 0.08 (P=0.06) between local candidate shares and party vote shares at election t. This provides weak support for the claim that Belgian parties get slightly better electoral results in arrondissements with more candidates. If we split this aggregate result over the eight parties, we only find significant correlations for the Flemish greens (ρ=0.42, P<0.001) and the Walloon socialists (ρ=0.27, P<0.05). In other words, there is absolutely no general positive association between candidate presence in arrondissements and vote shares. This might indicate that some Belgian parties instead apply the opposing expansion strategy. To examine this, we need to calculate the changes in candidate shares from election t-1 to election t (ΔCS) for every arrondissement, and the changes in party vote shares from election t-2 to election t-1 (ΔPS).

Table 1 gives an overview of the Pearson correlation coefficients and corresponding p-values between Δ CS and Δ PS. The first column shows the party for which the coefficient was calculated, the second column summarizes the number of observations for each of the parties in the dataset.

Table 1: Analyzed parties, observations (N), association between Δ CS and Δ PS (ρ) and P-value.

Party	N	ρ (Pearson corr. coeff.)	P-value
All	519	0.02	0.63
Flemish liberals	70	-0.29	0.01
Walloon liberals	59	0.10	0.43
Flemish Christian-democrats	70	0.44	0.00
Walloon Christian-democrats	57	0.30	0.02

Flemish socialists	74	0.09	0.41
Walloon Socialists	62	0.01	0.92
Flemish greens	69	-0.08	0.53
Walloon greens	58	-0.09	0.50

The correlation between these variables for the entire dataset (i.e. all parties) is not statistically significant. However, this does not necessarily mean that Δ CS and Δ PS are completely unrelated: parties might follow opposing strategies which explains the lack of any association. And indeed, Table 1 shows quite some inter-party variation in the results. Of the eight Belgian parties included in the dataset, there is a statistically significant correlation for three of them: the Flemish liberals and Christian-democrats, and the Walloon Christian-democrats. While the coefficient for the first party is negative, which supports the expansion strategy, the two latter parties seem to follow the opposing consolidation strategy.

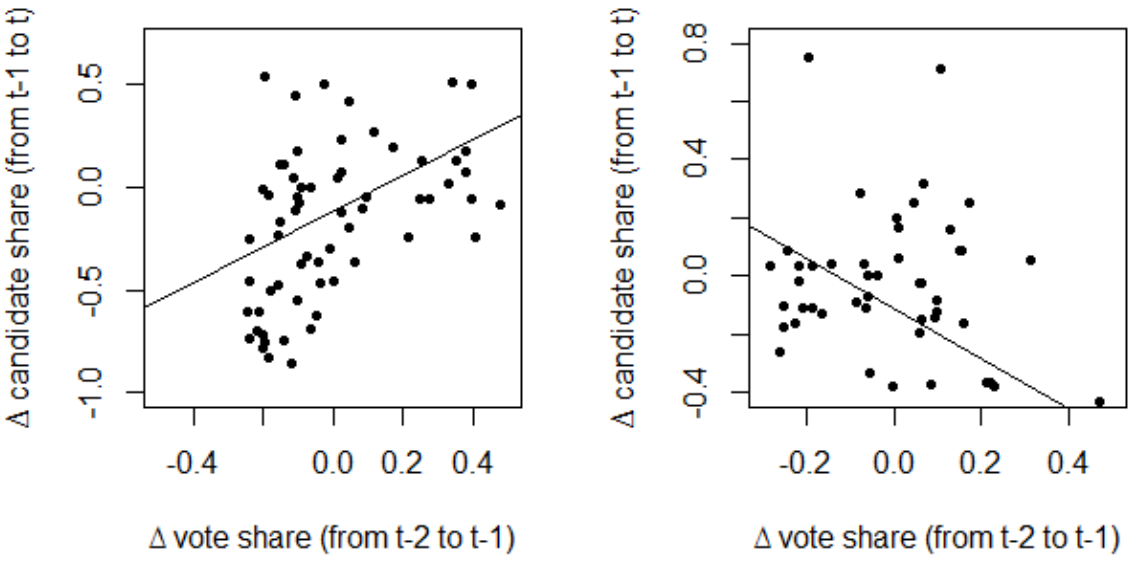

Figure 3: Scatterplots of observations for Flemish Chr. democrats (left plot; N=70) and Flemish liberals (right plot, N=70).

Especially the result for the Flemish Christian-democrats is substantial (ρ= 0.44, P<0.001). A scatterplot of the 70 observations for this party confirms the empirical support for a consolidation strategy (see Figure 3): increases in arrondissement vote shares are correlated with increases in candidate shares. The plot also shows that a decrease in vote shares (negative values on the horizontal axis) correspond to decreases in candidate shares. A comparable pattern was found for the Walloon Christian-democrats. The Flemish liberals, on the contrary, are the only case where a significantly negative correlation was found (ρ=-0.29, P<0.05). This supports the idea of an expansion strategy, where increases in vote shares from election t-2 to election t-1 are followed by increases in candidate shares from election t-1 to election t.

The data show substantial inter-party variation in geographical manipulation of candidate lists, but what explains this variation? According to the third and fourth hypothesis, the inclusiveness of the selectorate and the level of decentralization of candidate selection procedures could predict which strategies are used by parties. In a final step of the analysis, we test whether intra-party selection procedures affect these strategic choices by means of multivariate analysis.

For two reasons, an OLS regression analysis would not be suitable to model the variation in the dependent variable Δ CS. First, normality tests show that the dependent variable is non-normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk W = 0.89, P<0.001), which implies that one of the basic assumptions of linear regression is violated. Second, Δ CS has both negative and positive values, which problematizes interpretation of regression coefficients estimated by any model where Δ CS is treated as a continuous variable. As a consequence, we transformed Δ CS into a categorical variable with three responses: (1) positive values, which implies that the party has decided to increase candidate shares (n=116); (2) negative values, implying that the party

decreased candidate shares (n=255); and (3) (close to) zero values[9], where the party did not change anything about the number of candidates from the arrondissement (n=149). This categorization allows us to examine which parameters force parties to increase or decrease their candidate presence in arrondissements.

Table 2 presents the results of a multinomial logit model with 'status quo in candidate shares' as the reference category. The first column presents the estimated coefficients for parties decreasing their candidate shares, the second column deals with parties increasing candidate shares. The results suggest that the main independent variables of interest, selectorate and decentralization, significantly influence changes in party shares. Where party members are involved in the candidate selection procedures, there seem to be more changes to the geographical composition of party lists than in procedures with delegates or nomination committees. Highly inclusive parties either significantly decrease or increase their candidate shares, regardless of the change in party share over the last two elections. A possible explanation is that candidate selection processes with member involvement produce higher uncertainty: if members are able to modify the candidate lists drafted by the party elite, the outcome of the process will be less predictable. In the case of highly exclusive nomination committees, party elites have more grip on the outcome of the process, which leads to less modifications of party lists from one election to another.

[9] More specifically, all values in between -0.05 and 0.05 are included in this third category, which implies that candidate changes of less than 5% are considered too insignificant to be perceived an increase or decrease of candidates.

Table 2: Multinomial logit model with changes in candidate share as dependent variable.

	Decrease Candidate Share		Increase Candidate Share	
	β	(SE)	β	(SE)
District Magnitude	-0.05 ***	(0.02)	0.02	(0.02)
Δ Party Share	-1.19	(1.09)	-1.23	(1.05)
Selectorate (ref.: delegates)				
Nomination committee	-0.02	(0.35)	0.16	(0.33)
Members	1.26 **	(0.54)	0.89 *	(0.52)
Decentralization (ref.: mix)				
National level	-0.32	(0.35)	0.03	(0.33)
District level	-0.11	(0.38)	0.37	(0.34)
Relative size in district	-2.20 ***	(0.82)	-2.08 ***	(0.73)
Mean party share (t-2, t-1)	0.00	(0.02)	0.02	(0.01)
Δ Party Share * Nom. Com.	0.07	(1.03)	-0.40	(0.99)
Δ Party Share * Members	4.87	(3.80)	2.40	(3.73)
Δ Party Share * Nat. level	1.56 *	(0.90)	1.08	(0.89)
Δ Party Share * District level	-1.59	(1.14)	2.40 ***	(0.76)
McFadden's pseudo R^2		0.09		

Note: Log-odds and standard errors (between brackets) are shown. Reference category of the dependent variable is 'Status Quo in Candidate Share'. Significance: *** <0.01, ** < 0.05, * < 0.10 .

However, in response to changes in party shares, especially the decentralization dimension of candidate selection determines whether parties change the geographical composition of their candidate list. More specifically, the interaction term of changes in party share (Δ PS) and highly centralized selection procedures is significant. This shows that candidate selections dominated by the national party level respond to local increase in party shares by decreasing the presence of local candidates. If candidate selections are, however, dominated by the

district party level, the party responds to increased party shares by increasing the number of candidates from that area on the party list.

These results suggest that the applied strategies in response to local electoral volatility is dependent on the nature of intra-party candidate selection methods. Highly centralized parties more often apply expansion strategies, where the local candidate share of arrondissements decreases in response to increased vote shares. For decentralized parties, increased vote shares lead to increased candidate shares, which supports the consolidation strategy. These findings are in line with the fourth hypothesis. Concerning the inclusiveness of the selectorate, however, there are no conclusive findings to report: the interaction terms of changes in party share and selectorate do not contribute to the explanatory power of the model.

Besides the candidate selection procedures, the two control variables district magnitude and relative population size of the arrondissement in the electoral district also have significant effects on candidate shares. In larger districts, candidate shares will generally decrease less often. When M (= the number of seats in a district) is high, C (= the number of copartisans) will usually also be higher (Carey and Shugart, 1995; see, however: Crisp et al., 2007). In other words, candidate lists are longer in large districts, which reduces the need to severely lower or even remove local candidates from the list. Finally, the effect of relative size in the district shows that the number of local candidates from the largest arrondissements does not change that often over elections. This implies that parties will more often change then candidate shares of smaller arrondissements in the electoral district.

Reconsidering the hypotheses presented earlier in this paper, it is clear that only the effects of decentralization are supported by the data. Candidate selection does play a role, but not entirely in the way we described it: there is no support for the third hypothesis on the

selectorate. The presented model clearly lacks explanatory power: the pseudo R-square score of 0.09 suggests that we are currently overlooking other important predictors in this story.

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined the effects of changes in local vote shares on local candidate shares. By studying the geographical composition of party lists and election results for eight Belgian parties in seven Lower House elections, we analyzed whether there is a clear party strategy on how to respond to local electoral volatility using the geographical composition of party lists.

While the data have shown that some Belgian parties demonstrated the expected patterns, it appeared very difficult to pinpoint a more general relationship between local electoral volatility and changes in list composition. There are three possible explanations for these difficulties. First, it might be the case that there simply is no relationship here: parties do not perceive list positions as scarce campaign resources, but rather focus on campaign spending efforts to respond to local vote fluctuations. The geography criterion might not be equally important for all parties, resulting into geographically unbalanced candidate lists.

Second, while some parties do seem to take previous election results into account during candidate selection processes, their opposing strategies blur the image of a general relationship. In other words, it might be interesting to work with hierarchical models where the effect of changes in vote shares varies over the different parties. That way we would also be able to treat the candidate selection variables as level 2-predictors that vary over time and parties, but not within parties during an election. In this study, the number of observations and parties were too limited for estimating such hierarchical models. We need more data on the composition of candidate lists for a larger set of political parties to make this exercise.

Third, even if parties think about applying these strategies, they might not succeed because of the complex nature of intra-party candidate selection methods. More precisely, candidate lists could be considered the outcome of intraparty struggles between different factions, constrained by the rules of the candidate selection process (i.e. centralization, selectorate, candidacy and voting procedures). If candidate selection is indeed primarily a coordination game where party elites balance the interests of their party factions, there is of course little room for strategic maneuvers such as the ones analyzed in this paper.

Still, there are some indications that parties change their list compositions in response to previous election results. The question is what determines the large inter-party differences we observed in the bivariate analysis of the dataset. The multivariate analysis has shown that candidate selection procedures codetermine the share of local candidates in arrondissements. However, other party characteristics such as local party member figures, representation in local councils and local campaign efforts might contribute to the explanatory power of the current explanatory model, and should be integrated if reliable data is available.

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